

## WALKABOUTS



WalkAbouts are as basic as their title. The term refers to a type of wandering journey by Australian aborigines, but it is also used by Queen Elizabeth II to describe her public greet-and-meet walks outside Windsor Castle. ABLE Bodies WalkAbouts are similar; they allow participants to walk around the room and talk with each other as they warm up for class. WalkAbouts gradually turn into miniature obstacle courses as you begin adding a few simple everyday balance challenges. Be creative, but keep it simple. You just want them walking and practicing a few everyday skills, such as stopping and starting, changing direction and speed, turning, overcoming obstacles, and so on. Even short amounts of time spent walking can offer cardiorespiratory benefits, especially for frail participants. Encourage the more fit participants to do several laps for better results.

Many groups, especially frailer groups, would rather begin with stretching. It may be tough to get a committed group of preclass walkers; most participants may be intent on getting settled in their particular chair before class. Consider making name tags for the chairs so participants can save their spot. The majority of ABLE Bodies endurance training comes by way of WalkAbouts and by gradually increasing connected minutes of exercise.

### **Benefits »**

- Adds an aerobic component to classes.
- Practices everyday living skills.
- Includes balance challenges to keep it interesting and engaging.
- Practices recently learned skills.
- Enhances listening and reaction skills.

### **How to Do It »**

Plan WalkAbouts ahead of time. You can use the classroom space, but going to new areas, such as a hallway or outside on nice days, is always fun, too. The more you've done ahead of time, the more available you'll be to help participants. Your WalkAbout plan should include a floor plan with appropriate safe floor space and balance supports for safety (e.g., handrails, chairs). You should also plan for resting chairs and benches—it's always necessary to have some backup balance supports.

Anticipate traffic jams, which happen easily and create fall risks. Changes in direction are good for balance training but require planning and caution. Participants' abilities will vary widely, and many will use walkers and canes. If participants generally use walkers, encourage them to use their walkers here, too, and you need to plan for the extra congestion they will cause.

Some participants will have problems hearing commands. Be aware of noise levels in the room, especially when everyone is walking, talking, and having fun. Plan ahead so that all participants will be able to hear you. Do you need a microphone, or is there a specific place where you can stand and be heard best? Music may help with pacing, rhythm, and motivation; it has a way of keeping the group moving. However, it can also cause annoyance and confusion. In some situations adding music can be too much. Ideally, if you do choose to add music, do so softly and gradually; you'll learn from the participants what they prefer. Check with them about the volume and music choices. Have your selections cued ahead of time so you won't be distracted by changing music.

Keep WalkAbouts simple—resist the temptation to do too much at once or too soon. Chaos, defined as an out-of-control situation, can happen all too easily when too many people are doing too many things. Plus, this activity is for cardiorespiratory improvement. Adding several balance toys or challenges will slow that progression down and change the dynamics. Two kinds of balance challenges per course are probably about right.

The first goal is to just get participants up and moving before class. Slower people can walk inside the circle and faster ones can pass on the outside, which is a longer path. The first several weeks you offer a WalkAbout, do plain walking for 3 to 5 minutes. Let people go as slow as they need. Involve yourself—get in and walk and talk with them. Thank them for coming, and use their names. See how it goes the first few times and learn how you can make it go more smoothly.

After a few weeks, encourage a moderate pace. Moderate means they can walk and talk easily at the same time. Look for signs that they can do this with ease and confidence. Cue them to walk and talk with friends. They should appear comfortable and engaged. Socialize with them yourself—it's a simple way to monitor their intensity.

Over more time, add a bit of an obstacle course. Try ideas in Traffic School (chapter 7) for starters. Changes in pace and direction, commands to follow, and head turns add dual tasking and other balance aspects to WalkAbouts. If you plan to use any tape, chalk, cones, dots, or hurdles, give participants a few laps to observe the course first. Then when they're ready, they can play. It's always their choice.

Here are some cues you can use for WalkAbouts.

### ***Start Walking***

- ◎ Start slow, and stay slow if you'd like. Just keep walking at a pace that suits you.
- ◎ Stop and sit awhile if you like.
- ◎ There's no race; no hare and no tortoise. Walk at your own pace.
- ◎ Walk and talk. Share some news. Talk with your friends, have some fun, and keep going at your own pace.

Now you've got participants up and going. From here you can add changes to how they walk.

### ***Focus on Posture***

- ◎ Walk tall, everyone! Pretend there's a string from the crown of your head to the ceiling.
- ◎ If you have a walker, move closer to its front bar. It will be easier to walk tall that way.
- ◎ Walk with your stomach pulled in a little.
- ◎ Does that feel better for your back? (It definitely should.)
- ◎ Where are your shoulders?
  - Over your hips?
  - Or over your toes?
  - Which feels better?
- ◎ Did everyone notice how those changes in posture felt?
  - Slump walk
  - Bent Over Posture (chapter 5)
  - Tall walk
- ◎ Share the differences you feel. Just call out your answers! We'll all listen.